What Role for Trade in Food Sovereignty? Insights from a Small Island Archipelago

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Introduction: Reflecting on Food Sovereignty: A Small Island Case Study

Food sovereignty has been gathering momentum as a social and intellectual movement alongside mounting critical engagement, predominantly with regard to its emphasis upon increasing local food production as a means to repair the 'metabolic rift' between society and nature (Moore 2000; McMichael 2014). As laid out by the declaration of Nyeleni in 2007, food sovereignty refers to the 'right of nations and peoples to control their own food systems, including their own markets, production modes, food cultures and environments'. This declaration presents a critical alternative to neoliberal modes of agriculture and trade that take democracy, autonomy and choice as central to its agenda (Wittman, Desmarais, and Wiebe 2010; Friedmann and McMichael 1989). A wealth of literature provides fuller accounts of the movements' ambitions (Holt Giménez and Shattuck 2011; McMichael 2009), but there are two inter-related points of note for this study; first, the need to consider the role of trade in small island contexts, and second, the agency of those not currently identified as 'peasants' through the lens of current food sovereignty discourse. In this way, we build on Bernstein's (2014) observation that the degree of distance from ownership of the means of production makes for an internally differentiated peasant class with different interests, and consider in our analysis the narratives of both producers and consumers with little to no direct involvement in production. We suggest that their accounts offer alternative framings of the problem at hand, generating novel insights for pathways towards a more sovereign food future.

The paper discusses empirical data derived from case-study research conducted across a tropical small island archipelago: the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI), West Indies. TCI is composed of 40 different islands and cays, only eight of which are inhabited; five of which have major population centres on the islands of Providenciales, South Caicos, North Caicos, Middle Caicos and Grand Turk. A case study of this archipelago is instructive not least for the tensions it embodies on the global stage. TCI is classified as a High Income Country by the World Bank (2015); with economic growth in 2014 mainly derived from tourism and some international finance services estimated to be 4.6 percent (TCI Statistical Office 2015). However, despite this profile, the Minister of Finance, Investment and Trade highlighted the

"deplorable state of poverty" evidenced in the 2014 Poverty Report (Government of TCI 2014, 2). Moreover, one of the major headlines from this investigation was that 29% of households report problems paying for food, especially among the elderly (Halcrow Group Limited 2013). This raises the importance of understanding more about the nature of food provision on the islands.

To do so, this study draws on archival and contemporary documentary sources; 40 interviews across all islands and two householder focus groups on South Caicos and Grand Turk (2014) with members of the women's group 'Soroptomist International' as well as a further 30 interviews from preliminary fieldwork conducted in 2013 . Those interviewed work at the interface of economic, social and environmental institutions, and are taken as indicative voices of a range of groups: from 'Belongers' (full citizens) to émigrés (those with legal domicile but not full citizen status), youngsters to elders, and from civil servants to subsistence, commercial and experimental growers and fishers as well as consumers of food. Adopting a place-based approach, we engage with islanders' own vision of a 'good' life (Agarwal 2014) in interaction with their experience of negotiating ecological, economic and socio-political challenges over time. This takes seriously that agro-ecological production methods may not be the most suitable alternative for all small farmers (Li, 2014), and that defending traditional diets may not be sufficient to realign food consumption with notions of culturally appropriate eating. Indeed, in this case, we find an overwhelming population of island residents are now almost entirely divorced from both productive capacity and traditional foods. Considering the potential to realise food sovereignty in such a case is the exploratory aim of this paper; and doing so brings us to support the case for developing what Burnett and Murphy (2014) suggest is the movement's unclear stance on trade.

The potential for peasant movements to address the social/ecological contradictions of the global corporate food regime is, however, both celebrated and treated with reservation. Optimism is well captured by Wittman's (2009) suggestion that the Via Campesina movement – one of the most prominent organisations incubating the wider food sovereignty movement – is an example of agrarian citizenship challenging the commodification of labour and simplification of agriculture. While some suggest that the diversity of peasants across economic, political and ecological contexts can somewhat complicate a movements' potential to overturn the current regime (Edelman et al., 2014; Borras et al., 2008), Wittman embraces this diversity as a site of hope; perhaps on the basis that such recognition may encourage differing and spatially specific responses. For this reason, we adopt a place-based inductive approach (Marsden, 2012), which aims to avoid framings of aggregate problems and instead seeks to understand challenges as they manifest in particular spaces, places and times.

'Re-peasantisation' and Trade in a Small Island Context

As well as working towards the autonomy of peasant farmers from corporate controlled agriculture, the food sovereignty movement is concerned to revalorise human relationships with the land. Citing examples from across the globe, Van der Ploeg (2014) concludes that peasant agriculture has the capacity to deliver sufficient food for a growing global population while also rebalancing the Polanyian 'metabolic rift' (Wittman 2009). That is, by distancing themselves from mainstream markets, the peasant is thought to be further safeguarded against external shocks characteristic of capitalist modes of accumulation. Moreover, peasant farming practices are understood to have greater capacity to regenerate and enhance the biophysical basis of production (Van der Ploeg 2014), not least through their capacity to invest time and drudgery to the process of, for example, building soil fertility. By putting local ecological knowledge to use (Cullen-Unsworth et al. 2012) the peasant farmer is seen as a custodian of the land, who promotes the balanced reproduction of the productive base, and is actively concerned with the local and regional dispersal of goods. For this reason, local or regional consumption has been a core feature of the food sovereignty discourse across Northern and Southern contexts (Sage 2014, Altieri 2008).

Optimism for the potential of peasant modes of food production to reform agricultural practices and increase consumer demand for socially embedded products is well captured by scholars such as Hendrickson and Heffernan (2002) and Wittman (2009). This potential is thought to come from a process of reconnection, which can be characterised as building closer relationships between producers and consumers and as reworking the form and process of exchange into modes that resist global corporate agriculture. Hendrickson and Heffernan (2002) point to the food itself as such a point of reconnection between alienated consumers and producers; a relationship that is complimented by attention to seasonality (Kneafsey et al. 2008) as values of trust and commitment replace those grounded predominantly in economic exchange. Re-linking space/place and time through food promotes resistance to the encroachment of highly rationalised systems upon areas of life more suited to alternative logics (Habermas 1984; Ritzer 2004).

On the other hand, it is increasingly noted that opportunities for reform are largely accessible only by the privileged (Hinrichs 2000, Paddock, 2015a, 2015b), which we suggest makes it unlikely that such focus upon 'reconnection' will bring about the scale of change necessary to realign a disenchanted food system with the 'lifeworld' principles of autonomy and reciprocity that underpin the food sovereignty agenda. In this way, we identify the kinds of fissures that Wittman (2009) sees as opportunities for a diversity of responses to socio-ecological contradictions – the 'metabolic rift' - that characterise the current disenchanted global food system. While the peasant class are charged with the potential to rise against this obstacle (Moore 2000), it is important to note that due to political, ideological and class differences, they do not necessarily share one common cause, motivation or route for change (Bernstein 2013, Borras et al. 2008, Edelman 2008). We add complication to this diffuse peasantry by pointing to consumers as actors whose position outside the agricultural context renders their voices as entirely neglected in debates surrounding food sovereign

futures. Although an undeniably important aspect of the food sovereignty movement has been to focus on the alienation of peasant farmers from their productive capacity and their ability to produce in line with agro-ecological principles and practice (Friedmann 2006; Van der Ploeg 2014), we depart from this focus. Taking inspiration from these perspectives, we move away from attention to the autonomy of workers and peasants, and consider instead what food sovereignty means in the context of total alienation. That is, we give attention to those now entirely divorced from the ability to produce, or to access valued foods that they would otherwise have accessed via local markets. Paying such attention to these actors, we suggest, brings new interpretations to well-rehearsed arguments that deny the possibility of developing local agriculture. We also contend that a turn to increased localism may not be in the interest of all communities in question. For example, other place-based case studies find that, for good reasons, small farmers do not always fight their assimilation into global market relations (Li 2015). Indeed, the highlanders discussed by Li (2015) abandoned food production for mono-crop cacao without pressure from corporate or state actors or agri-development schemes. While some achieved their goals, others failed to establish a 'middle peasant' lifestyle and were forced to sell their land, necessitating entry into wage labour. Despite this polarised experience, the unsuccessful highlanders still did not express a wish to return to subsistence farming. This begs the question as to under what conditions a balance might be struck between the security of food supply and the right to realise one's own vision for development (see Jansen 2014).

The beginning of a solution to this imbalance is raised by Burnett and Murphy (2014), who ask 'what role for trade in the food sovereignty agenda?' While they suggest that the food sovereignty movement is vocal in questioning the legitimacy of the World Trade Organisation to govern food and agriculture, they argue that this should not be viewed as a recommendation against entering international markets. Arguing for a more considered and clear stance on international trade is borne from recognition that in taking a position against objectionable practices of liberalisation and privatisation that come to cement corporate power, the food sovereignty movement have therefore neglected to fully develop their position on international trade. Indeed, citing a more recent Nyeleni (2013) newsletter, they state that the food sovereignty movement does advocate trade and investment where it serves the collective aspirations of society. Fair-trade practices, for example, are considered one way that international trade might contribute to this endeavour. While some have criticized such an a interpretation, arguing that fair trade perpetuates the export driven economies that marginalise food security concerns, Smith (2009, 2013) has identified that such forms of governance may enhance their capacity to overcome historically imposed constrains on producing food for local markets. In this way, the connection between local and global is nested; locally centred, yet connected as the need arises, as Van der Ploeg (2014) has argued in relation to case studies in countries such as China, Latin America, and the Netherlands. However, we would argue that continental land masses are constrained

differently than island states with regards to the principles of food sovereignty – which again formed a fundamental driver for the empirical analysis reported here.

Methodology: Narrative inquiry for a place-based approach

The data collected comprises economic data alongside a reading of historical texts and documents, which underpin interviews with policy actors, experimental food growers and islanders who had no direct or formal connection with food production. Participants were invited to speak of daily routines, the foods they eat, the foods they like as well as how, where and how often they access these foods, leading to discussions of life on the islands, changes experienced, and challenges faced over time. Stories of better times are told alongside those of hardship as well as hopes for the future, and it is through such narrative that we can not only gain an insight into how participants speak of habitual practices, but also of the sets of relationships and structures around which daily life becomes organised, understood and reproduced. That is, for the experience of the individual is produced in interaction with the structural facts of economy, polity, and, we would add, ecology- in ways that C. Wright Mills characterises the private troubles of the individual as rooted in public issues (Mills 1959). Therefore, our analysis looks to experience centred personal narratives (Squire 2012), rather than the syntax of storied events as linguistic or conversational analysis might do (Andrews, Squire, and Tamboukou 2015), an approach that mirrors previous work related to the foodways of the Caribbean (Houston 2007; Campbell, 1988).

In this way, we are thinking 'big' with 'small' stories (Georgakopoulou 2006), and we do not see the study of narrative as an end in itself. We are concerned with what narrative can tell us about the teller, their identity, and the socio-ecological world that their experience is nested within. This is not to idealise, essentialise or celebrate the account of individuals in place of 'grand narratives' (Atkinson and Delamont 2006), but is a way to connect with the teller's experience, identity and interaction with the institutions, ecology and culture that shape daily lives over time. This opens up a space for new understandings that equip us to challenge dominant problem representations and the consequent framing of policy solutions. A nuanced appreciation of the dynamics underpinning the perceived policy problem might open new ways of seeing the problem at hand (see Bacchi 2009), and hence open pathways to solutions that might otherwise have been simply dismissed, or might never have even come to rumination. In this case, narrated experience alongside official documents, statistics and historical sources bring to the fore a tension between different accounts and justifications for the denial of agriculture that, if worked with rather than against could form the beginnings of a more sovereign food future for TCI islanders.

Moreover, our approach differs from Edelman et al. (2014), who argue that where traditional diets may already be lost, food sovereignty should promote 'food literacy' to re-educate communities with regards to the benefits of local foods. Instead, we argue that in

place of deciding which diets should be upheld or restored, researchers should explore variation in food preferences across communities in tandem with historical analysis of the dynamics of social, political, economic and environmental change. That is, food sovereign pathways may only be identified through the explication of issues and problems that matter to people (Sayer, 2011). This is no simple feat, for food often bears the signs of struggle over valued material and symbolic resources (Paddock, 2015a; 2015b). The task at hand is therefore to identify the best conditions under which the most appropriate foods can be produced, sourced, supplied and consumed without compromising ways of life valued by communities. By deconstructing discourses around food supply, as well as emerging trajectories of development in this sector, we are able to highlight points of opportunity and tension. In this way, the article aims to feed into the food sovereignty movement's call for great democratisation of the food supply system, specifically by adding to a knowledge base that can inform grass-roots discussion and debate about the future of food supply across the islands. Moreover, we support what Schiavoni (2016) puts forward as the 'historical, relational and interactive' (HRI) approach to food sovereignty research, where she emphasises that pursuing food sovereignty is a *process* as opposed to an outcome. Attention to this process requires a lens of analysis that looks at the relationship between different actors – as we do in this article – and the state, and over time. The sociological and historical perspective taken here seeks to address many of these same shortcomings identified by Schiavoni (2016), most pertinently the neglect of social actors, and notably the neglect of *consumers* as actors within the food system, which we address through our focus upon narrative as a means to connect stories and experience across both generation and position within and outside of the relations of production.

Food Provisioning on the Turks and Caicos: An Historical Overview

Following the decimation of Taino inhabitants of TCI by European disease and slavery in the 15th century, Salt Cay and Grand Turk (although not yet the Caicos Islands) were re-inhabited on a seasonal basis by Bermudans 'saltrakers' from around 1668: who came to the islands to harvest the initially naturally occurring salt (Booy 1918, 38; Sadler 2008a, 97). Just prior to the American War of Independence (1775) there were just "eighteen white heads of families, and forty slaves…resident inhabitants on the islands", with the majority of another 100-200 individuals spending time on the island only for the salt season, February to April (MacKinnen 1804).

Importantly, the re-habitation of the Turks Islands was fundamentally connected to global trade integration (Smith, in review). Firstly, the preserving qualities of salt underpinned the expansion of sea exploration, transport and trade, and therefore facilitated deepening trade integration across the world (Kennedy 2007, 218). Indeed, salt exports from TCI increased from 2,000 bushels (660 tons) in 1700 to a peak of 2.2 million bushels in 1887 (see Figure 1) and provided significant supplies needed for Britain's North American Colonies (Turks and Caicos National Museum 2013). Secondly, evidence suggests that from the start of this

modern resettlement period, the population has largely and continually relied on imported food. This is partly attributed to high levels of salinity, which rendered the islands largely vegetation-less and with few animals (Annual Register 1765; The British Magazine 1764). To this effect, historical sources explain that for the salt-rakers; "food is [imported] salt pork and now and then a guana (a sort of large lizard) when they have time to catch them, and [that] very often they are without "bread" (Annual Register 1765). It is also noted that "stinking rum" and "musty biscuit" were also imported in exchange for exported salt (Annual Register 1765).

Figure 1: Salt Export from TCI 1700-1962 (Compiled by authors from administrative records and secondary sources)

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More agricultural activity was recorded when British Loyalists and their slaves, fleeing the loss of their land in Florida in 1783 (Sadler 2008b, 111-2), allegedly renewed settlement of the Caicos Islands. This new population introduced plantation agriculture, and although production was prominently focused on cotton rather than food, and grown by slaves rather than a peasantry, the case offers an historical example of cash crops directly substituting local food production (Friedmann and McMichael 1989). Although, some food production was indeed likely, there is no archaeological evidence that domestic animals were kept, and although methods are not appropriate for identifying the existence of ground provisions, existing scholarship suggests that the population lived mainly from fishing and trade (Farnsworth 1993, 9).

While the physical geography of a small island archipelago is noted for its limitations with regard to developing economies of scale for agriculture development (Streeten 1993) small-island economies have been known for the intimate historical relationships upheld between inhabitants and marine resources (Keegan et al. 2008; Carlson 1999, 62). However, although fish has always been eaten locally, it has also long been traded in volume for other foodstuffs. Most notably, the Queen Conch fishery that emerged in the mid-1800s is reported to have dried its catch to exchange with Haiti for fruit, sugar cane, vegetables and rum (Rudd 2003, 149 & 51). Granted that initial records are poor, Figure 1 is, however, indicative of exports over time. Furthermore, historic accounts confirm the importance of conch as a traded for other food, given the lack of local production (MacKinnen 1804, 18).

Figure 2: Conch Exports (units) from TCI (data compiled by author from various sources with missing data smoothed)

[About here]

Following the failure of the cotton industry on the Caicos Islands due to pests and hurricanes, departing white farmers abandoned their slaves either to the salt industry or subsistence livelihoods based on fishing and farming (Booy 1918, 39; Sadler 2008b, 112-3). It was at this point that the first subsistence 'peasant' farmers appeared on the Caicos Islands. On numerous occasions, the islands' administration subsequently attempted to upscale this growing activity (Watkins 1907, 14; Smith 1916, 9; Moir 1865, 18), although despite some moderate successes, technical and administrative experimentation throughout the intervening decades failed, and records are regularly punctuated with laments of poor soil fertility, unreliable rain and frequent hurricanes (Smith, in review).

While remaining part of Britain, and being converted to a full Overseas Protectorate in 1973, with a first nationally elected government in 1976, TCI increasingly moved into the socio-economic sphere of the United States. Indeed, the construction of a US missile base in 1952-3 "had considerable effect on the previously isolated community" (Colonial Office 1955, 3). Moreover, as the salt industry declined, the fish export trade was increasingly modernized with investments in processing plants, the output of which was mostly exported to the USA (SC8). Following eventual closure of the salt industry in 1974, the British and TCI governments promoted tourism as an alternative economic driver. In the 1980s the airport and road infrastructure on the largest island (Providenciales) was improved, and the first resort hotel was built by 'Club Med' in 1984 (Turks and Caicos Current 1981, 9; 1983, 7). Since then, TCI has become home to hundreds of hotels and condominium apartments, a multitude of tourist activities and a cruise ship port. In 2013 there were just over 1 million tourists visiting, 80% of which were from the USA (Turks and Caicos Tourist Board 2013, 1 & 5). As with other Small Islands States in the Caribbean, West Indian region and across the world, hotels and restaurants contribute the largest percentage of GDP (World Tourism Organisation 2014): some 42 percent in 2011 (Turks & Caicos Government 2013b, 23).

This transition from the salt industry to tourism has had two significant impacts in terms of food supply, and mirrors the agricultural retreat in the Caribbean noted by Marsden (1997). Firstly, there has been significant population growth following the emergence of opportunities in construction and tourism services (Figure 3), and the previously declining population was reinvigorated with migrants and those returning to the islands (P6).

Figure 3: Official Population of TCI (compiled by the authors from various official sources)

[About here]

The second demographic impact of economic transition was the shift of population from South Caicos and Grand Turk to the epicentre of the tourist industry on Providenciales. Thirdly, and arguably most significantly, the increasing population created demand for more food. Here, as a consequence of economic and physical geography as well as the opening of a wide range of international restaurants, and growing exposure to US Television advertising from 1981 onwards, food was sourced from imports rather than endogenous production (Smith, in review). Following a deepening of this situation, by 2012 TCI spent over $60 million on imported food, the third largest import expense after mineral fuel and machinery (Turks & Caicos Government 2013a, 24). At the time of writing, just over 90% of all food consumed on the islands (measured by financial value) is imported from, or via the USA. Indeed, the decline in fish catch, partly a result of declining stocks and partly the structural transition in practices away from fishing to employment in the service economy, the majority of fish consumed on the islands is now imported (Baker et al. 2015).

Once imported food arrives in TCI, wholesalers and supermarkets (which often have both retail and wholesale functions) supply a network of shops varying in size, across the islands. At times, shop keepers travel to Providenciales to purchase and then ship goods by boat (SC7, SC8, SC10). While the smaller hotels (50-100 room) buy from the big supermarkets who import the food themselves (P5, P6), larger hotels import their own food directly – with the very biggest having offices in the USA to coordinate sourcing and supply – or through large wholesalers such as SISCO (P6). There are also boats from the Dominican Republic and Haiti that call at various points of each island supplying fresh produce - albeit irregularly - such as fresh potatoes, fruits, mangoes and avocadoes to local residents (SC1, SC5). There is some commercial production of food on the islands, primarily on two farms in North Caicos, which sell produce such as tomatoes, green bananas, okra, hot peppers, chickens and pork meat to supermarkets, approximately every month (P8, NC3&4). There is also a commercial hydroponics farm, and an on-going effort to farm conch, although the farm is currently non-operational (P5&14). In summary then, it can be noted that while interviewees frequently mentioned keeping kitchen-gardens, and note that some islanders, particularly on North and Middle Caicos, even still keep animals such as chickens and pigs, local production supplies an inconsequential volume of the food consumed on the islands.

Figure 4: Breakdown of GDP in TCI by Sector

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Indeed, while there has been local food production on TCI, the degree of its 'nested' (Van der Ploeg, 2014) relationship to the international trade systems has been intensive for the population has always relied heavily on imported food. However, as will be discussed below, it is also clear that there have been long held ambitions to increase the food self-sufficiency

of the islands. Mirroring discourse and practice elsewhere in the region, the current situation of external dependency has dampened this drive.

Constructing Contemporary Food Sovereignty? Reifying and disruptive economic, ecological and social narratives

Set against the context outlined above, the remainder of the article analyses islanders' narratives concerning their foodways alongside consideration of their appetite for endogenous food production. We identify narratives that reify the current system – by deferring provision to trade and investing little in endogenous production – as well as those that contest it – by fighting for alternatives. That these narratives speak to the experience of actors within and outside of the food system, they represent those typically under-explored in discussions of food sovereignty, yet they are actors alienated not only from their productive capacity, but their ability to access foods considered appropriate to their way of life.

Trade and Development: evolving tastes?

Discussions with residents and experts support the historiographical analysis presented above; that many of the so-called traditional foods, such as peas, rice and plantains have long been imported (SC11). However, many senior citizens observe the growing intensity of new types of imported food (P3, 6, 8, 11, SC8, 22, 23, MC1) with a key change being the appearance of exports from the USA (SC1). Such observations are contextualised within both objective and normative discourses of wider development.

In objective terms, informants note that as "fish went out of the country, other things came in to make the most of the trip" (SC1) with the fish plants providing the wage work needed to purchase imports (SC1, 9, P11) and accumulation by plant owners providing finance for investments in local food shops (SC9). Many informants suggest that due to its isolation, Grand Turk has long been supplied by imported food (SC8, 22), which support the historical evidence that even on Middle and North Caicos,- where some food was grown - inhabitants started to travel to South Caicos to buy additional supplies with cash earned from the sale of fish and ground provisions (SC7, 8). Increasing imports are also understood to have been mirrored by a "gradual" (P6) decline in endogenous production of both ground provisions and meat (P9). For example, several informants noted that by the time they were grown up, only a couple of people still had cows and pigs (NC2). Although,

> "it was only in 1982 that Middle and North Caicos got roads and electricity…that's when the change started to happen that it became possible to get imported food easily, whereas before it was just really basic provisions like rice and flour and things

like that, all of a sudden from the 80's on you could get sausages on a stick with a pancake wrapped around" (P2 – also NC2).

Records show that female involvement in farming remained widespread on the Caicos Islands through the 1980s (Weis 1986a; Weis 1986b; Maltsberger 1983, 1982). However, documentary and interview evidence also indicates that many individuals stopped cultivating food once they obtained wage work (P10; Maltsberger 1982) as food "was cheap at that time" and wages were comparatively high (P2). Moreover, residents state that still to this day, little food is produced on the islands, and even some of those involved in commercial production report that they supply relatively little to local markets (NC1). Moving to normative narratives, some senior citizens reflect that in the past, food provision was uncertain, as summarised by the accounts of eating "pen on": an expression which means 'depends on' what there is, and what fish has been caught that day. This can be seen as both an expression of insecurity but also of skill and resilience (SC23; Bowen 2003). This is an important artefact from the foodways of TCI as is mirrors that of 'making do', which has been shown to speak 'to the unique cultural and agricultural context' of the Caribbean (Houston 2007). However, others see traditional food, such as "gritz" as "poor people's food, and say "I'm not going to eat that" (SC23). By contrast, the increasing variety of food, partly driven by tourist expectations for international cuisine (Turks and Caicos Current 1982a, 78; 1982b, 16) is valued by the locals. For example one informant noted that:

> "once the freight plane starts coming [from the United States] we get more stuff like…American bread…eggs and sausages and hot dogs and different kinds of meat…So breakfast diet changed" (P2 - SC7).

Further explanations regarding labour saving and expanding food choice are offered when talking about development of the island:

> "As the economy grew, people became more sophisticated, once we got electricity and then the factories started bringing in meats like pork chops and spare ribs and things like that, people just didn't want to bother with fish because fish is a laborious thing, because you've got to clean, and not everybody wants to do that to a fish, so it's easier to go and buy pork chops and spare ribs and readymade chicken… It was after these things started coming to the island that people preferred it" (SC23).

These narratives could be considered testament to an inevitable shift towards a highly globally integrated market economy, where wage labour in service industries develops purchasing power. The resulting ability to buy consumer foods that contribute to a diversification of culture (Li 2015), may indeed be considered a welcome step away from the insecure days of 'pen on' and the laborious tasks of gutting, drying and salting provisions.

However, while the current food options might be represented as those now preferred by islanders, in actuality, these are chosen not exclusively by local demand, but are also shaped by suppliers in the USA. In the view of many, they come at the expense of accessibly priced healthier fresh foods currently out of reach for the majority of islanders (P15) – as manifest in widespread food insecurity at the household level (Halcrow Group Limited 2013). Speaking of favourite foods, fresh fish, mangoes, green banana, cantaloupes, pears, avocadoes, plantains, tomatoes appear among long lists of fresh produce named. For one participant these are categorised as "natural foods" (SC5) in contrast with the canned foods usually bought in the local store, which are invariably imported via Miami. Fresh foods are surreptitiously sourced from the boats that arrive from the Dominican Republic and Haiti on a somewhat regular basis to sell such produce at less than a third of the cost of that imported from the US. While their costs are somewhat reduced due to the informality of this trade – the standards of health and safety of which are questioned by some (P3) – this illustrates that there is demand for fresh produce, despite an overriding discourse that attributes changing diets to be the result of shifting tastes towards salty and fatty processed foods (see Paddock, in review)

This issue of dependency on imported foods primarily obtained from the US is raised as a source of great tension among senior citizens, who have witnessed the gradual shift in available foods with the intensification of this trade relation. While the convenience of imported foods is celebrated for its potential to liberate from long-winded domestic chores, they also reflect that there must be some middle way between convenience and freshness. We contend that this ground lies in a narrative of autonomy that is expressed through desire to reduce dependence on US imports. That is,

> "I may never in my generation be able to say 'America, we don't need you anymore', but at least we'll be able to not just send all our money away and not be so dependent. If we could just do 25%" (P10).

Appetite for endogenous development is, however, met with some resistance due to geographical and ecological limits imposed by the islands' climate, geological composition, and remote position, explored below. This narrative is also overlain with the promise of contemporary possibility afforded by what we would call a smarter kind of trade while making use of new technologies and renewed expertise in tropical agriculture and animal husbandry.

Ecological Limitations for Endogenous Food Developments?

Many informants draw on knowledge of both the past and the present to echo historical accounts, and agree that there are limitations of physical geography on the potential for

endogenous production food (e.g. GT3). One points out that "the salt is something else, it kills plants, it kills cars, it kills everything" (GT2) and many others point out there is insufficient rain for growing (SC1, GT3 & GT2). Even where it is acknowledged that some food can be grow on the 'salt islands', it is hedged with the view that this is still narrow in variety and volume (SC9).

Informants, including the Director of Agriculture, were more positive about the potential of North and Middle Caicos to grow food, "because they have ground water and they have a bit more soil" (P5 – also GT3). Describing returning to the islands in the 1970s, P5 grew much of her own food for about 4 years, including corn, peas, potatoes, cane and papaya. However, even those supportive of taking advantage of these increased opportunities highlight limitations such as the

> "vegetables that we grow here aren't as sweet like tomatoes that you'll get from let's even say Florida or California…due to the fact that they have to work so hard that they metabolise most of their sugars rather than storing it" (P5).

Conversely, small farmers and experimental growers suggest that these climate impacts upon agricultural practices are not insurmountable. In fact, building on long standing efforts – for example by a nursery that opened its doors in the early 1980s and aspired to grow food for the islanders (Turks and Caicos Current 1985) – advances in aquaponics and hydroponics supply locally grown vegetables (albeit at high cost) to a local supermarket. They have also developed techniques for growing at home with the use of irrigation and composting from the islands' profusion of wild animals. Crucially, the suggestion here is not that people return to homestead kitchen gardening to meet subsistence needs, but that support be given to those who are interested and willing to farm at scale. Support for such development, it would seem, is stifled by inadequate funding for the Government Farm, which exists for this purpose, but remains under-utilised as a space in which to explore the potential for agriculture at scale on TCI . It is also noted that while there has been notable temporary successes on the Government Farm, the historical evidence shows that these have neither been sustainable over time nor transferable to wider practices (Smith, in review): and a number of contemporary stakeholders suggested that government investment would be better used for agricultural extensions services for private efforts. Moreover, a wider current problem is that new import restrictions which have created almost insurmountable barriers for the import resources essential for agricultural innovation. One informant is worth quoting at length:

> "So what has happened is now we don't have these things, these bees and certain other livestock and other certain poultry breeds […] and now we can't get them, because the standards are so high and the market here is so tiny. There's only one hatchery in the United States right now that will export here, and they only export commercial breeds of chickens, nothing else. So if you want, I have like two Tom turkeys that are dying to reproduce but I can't get hens anymore because the laws

> that changed. Whereas now as an individual, as a small farmer I could never afford to bring in, it would cost me thousands of dollars to bring in 2 or 3 hen turkeys. The regulations now is such that, I mean, they have to come in, in a USDA sealed box, and like I said there's only one facility that does that and they don't sell eggs either, they only sell chicks, and they only sell breeds that are production breeds, so there's no prospect of getting heritage breeds that would do better here – that's a big problem […) it's legislation for dealing with a problem that doesn't exist, because you don't have these, you'd just be importing a bad solution, as opposed to something that has a bigger impact" (NC1).

Rather than a problem of physical geography, this is a problem of inadequate cross-sectoral policy integration. While instilling such integration is a challenge faced by administrations of all scales across the globe, the impacts of poor policy integration and inappropriate policy transfer appear to be magnified when operating at this scale. It might also be suggested that seeking advice from US institutions, which may reflect the interests of profit driven entities in the country, might not be the best means of developing policy in such contexts (McMichael 1992). Problems of location may indeed be ameliorated in part by a diversification of trade relationships, but there still remains the impasse between narratives expressing desire for the development of endogenous food, those that simultaneously bemoan the lack of interest in investment, as well as narratives that decry the cultural inappropriateness of agriculture to a nation built on slavery. Unpacking these narratives, we see that the food sovereignty framework offers a pathway forwards.

Re-peasantisation: Decreasing dependence through endogenous development?

Another discourse reproduced in the accounts of many interviewees is the view that residents are not interested in growing food on the islands. One pro-food producing islander recalls that "as a matter of fact there was a group of guys that used to do that [grew food], you know, early in the morning and after school that was the way we make a few dollars. But not everybody get to like it, some people didn't like it" (P2). Documentary evidence identifies that farming required growers to start work at sunrise, and walk two or three miles between home and the fields to work only with machete (Weis 1986b, 40-1). A central government official (GT1) further suggested that agriculture echoes a slave legacy, noting that "we're too close to that, I dare say, we're actually too close to the subsistence farming history, whereas agriculture is not glorious enough" (NC1). For example, efforts to start an agricultural science programme at the local high school on North Caicos (1992-7) met with resistance from both parents and other teachers, reportedly due to echoes of the unsavoury heritage of growing on the islands (P4).

Although the food sovereignty movement certainly advocates for the rights of small farmers in order to protect endogenous food production from corporate interests, this is sometimes read as a rather radical statement that promotes a return to traditional, simple ways of life. More recently, this rather romanticised view of peasant agriculture has come under question (Bernstein, 2013; Agarwal, 2014; Li, 2014) in ways supported by our understanding of the will for and interest in agricultural development across TCI. That is, while there has been a drive for educating for agriculture on TCI, resistance is expressed as contrary to islanders views of the 'good life', of the very process of attempting to instil an idea that agriculture is what young islanders should want to do in the future. Such a narrow frame is contrary to the very principles of autonomy underpinning food sovereignty. We also find a disruptive narrative to this resistance/disinterest, through the presence of a critical number of islanders with commitment and expertise for experimentation and development in agriculture across TCI.

Our interviews with these key individuals alongside visits to their enterprises were testament to the real possibility of furthering endogenous food developments in the future. What is lacking is the appreciation that t*his is wanted by communities as a means of building the autonomy of the islands* but they do not wish to see widespread return to toil, hardship and isolation associated with plantation or peasant agriculture. One informant expressed that:

> "North Caicos is fertilized by God, who would like to see us doing some good farming, and raise cows and chickens – we can do it, and then we won't have to import everything, we can help the cost not to be so great. We may not reach the point to have no imports, but at least we won't be so dependent" (P10).

When asking if there are any challenges in people having the right or enough foods to sustain themselves, a further interviewee adds that there is a concern that people are eating more imported meats, in which there are more chemicals. This "freaks" her out because "every month you hear that someone else has cancer and that scares me" (NC2). Indeed, on the appointment of a new Director of Agriculture at the end of 2015 they note that in addition to sufficient food, "Everyone is entitled to safe" nutrition, and therefore pledged to promote domestic production (Turks & Caicos Islands Government Press Office 2015). A barrier to realising this renewed objective is not that people are disinterested in agriculture, but, we argue that assumptions obstruct support for those who are.

> "I really have a passion for agriculture. I grew up on a farm probably the only farm that was on Grand Turk. (…) It's important for me now to really get into agriculture. The price of meat and everything the way it's going up, crazy. You know, before in the past it didn't really make sense to raise chickens because they were so cheap, why raise it when I can go in a store and buy it? Now it's changing. (…) "We've been

importing stuff almost forever. And I guarantee you food that we get is not good" (P2).

Concern over the poor quality of imported foods is also met with the problem of quality and consistency of supply of endogenously produced foods. That is, rather than concern and anxiety about genetic modification and artificial additives, there are concerns over hygiene practices in raising and slaughtering animals; and these are contrasted to the certified standards of food exported from and through the US (P3). Purchasers at hotels suggest that while they are happy to buy what produce they can from local producers, there is inconsistency in volume of supply (P6). Stakeholders reflect that this is because;

> "we're still on that sort of knife edge between subsistence agriculture and production agriculture […) those two professions are different enough in mentality, and you're better off going and having an accountant, turn them into a production farmer, than you are turning a subsistence farmer into a production farmer" (NC1).

Even in the case of the government farm that operates on TCI, the lack of funding and human resources is considered to result in inconsistent production and poor crop quality, where "nobody can depend on the farm for what they need" (NC1). Being on the 'knife-edge' between subsistence and production agriculture highlights challenges to notions of re-peasantisation. As the revalorisation of local ecological knowledge becomes complicated by calls for technically enhanced methods for producing under harsh tropical conditions, we are shown competing visions, or indeed 'mentalities', of the agricultural worker and his/her future role in developing food production methods. From the apparent incommensurability of these competing mentalities – we might conclude that that there is little potential for the development of agriculture for a more food sovereign future for TCI islanders. Yet, we find productive tension between these narratives, and suggest that a more robust consideration of international trade for small island economies is imperative to any effort to secure greater autonomy and self-determination.

Conclusions: A growing appetite for endogenous food?

Unpacking the seemingly competing narratives outlined above, we see there is a pathway forwards for development that more readily promote ways of life valued by islanders. It is certainly the case that many anticipate development around the tourism sector (SC11) and look to conventional development to help with food provision (P11, SC11&12). Such increases in employment within the tourism sector are simultaneously thought to fuel discourses of opposition to agriculture, in that such jobs mark a separation from the toil of

working outdoors on the land. However, it is also noted that the tourism industry simply restates this problem of servility and dependence, with such jobs creating a new generation of "slaves on the beach" (Augier 2014).

However, as noted above, there are a growing number of individuals with the enthusiasm and expertise necessary to develop agriculture appropriate to tropical climates in ways that do not readily resonate with the idea of agriculture as toil and dependence; the kind of drudgery associated with Li's (2014) and Agarwal's (2014) farmers.. In this way, the future of agriculture across TCI is being re-imagined and to some extent realised by small-scale projects. Yet, this re-imagination and enthusiasm is largely under-supported, and such projects fail to grow to production at a scale that would substantially increase the amount of endogenously produced food desired by islanders. One pathway forwards, which emerges from respondent narratives, is an appetite for government investment alongside trade reform. For example, the government might invest in a professional farm manager who could consolidate knowledge of best local growing practices, with a view to break-even on costs, channelling produce for social programs (as suggested by NC1); or by supporting private food production efforts for local markets. Creative public policies elsewhere (Chang 2012) might be mirrored to invest in key infrastructure working to appropriate standards, for example, through the construction of a slaughterhouse to support efforts at chicken and pig farming; or the provision of appropriate crown land for exclusively agricultural use on a leasehold basis, with any violation punished through eviction and repossession. As the former Director of Agriculture on the island suggests, investments must be coordinated as opposed to individualised: with various aspects of the supply network developed to deal effectively with waste, as well as to meet the human capital needs for such economic activity (P1). While investment, we argue, is worthwhile for expanding currently marginalised opportunities for a wider variety of foodways on the islands, the weather and soil conditions of this small island archipelago might somewhat hamper this ambition. This case therefore supports an expanded food sovereignty framework that takes into account the necessity for trade, practiced under conditions appropriate to this place and the aspirations of its communities. That is,

> "I wouldn't say we can abolish (imports), but we won't have to be dependent 100%. I don't believe we can be independent, but I do believe we can curtail, slow down and at least make 25% of food ourselves. Anyone with any thinking ability will say the same thing" (P10).

In this way, we identify among islanders a call to take seriously the need for greater autonomy for the islands in decision-making processes that determine the conditions of their own food supply. It is imperative that these processes promote access to foods that are culturally and nutritionally appropriate, and that that they are able to continue to secure such access over time. This is most pertinent where the process of liberalisation and of

privatisation have cemented corporate power in ways that have deepened relations of dependence. We argue that the answer does not lie in 'defensive localism' (Winter 2003) – a course through which local food is considered a means through which to revalorise demoralised food regimes, which is thought to have somewhat overpromised in its reach potential for transformation – but in fostering *better conditions of trade*, to include the import of animals and plants. This should involve appropriate regional partners alongside the support for local production as appropriate to that place in that "we need to understand the complex meanings and significations attached to acts of consumption so as to avoid false dichotomies between globalised food systems and alternative consumption practices" (Winter, 2003:31).

Moreover, while the food sovereignty framework can be seen to defend traditional diets, we argue that it is not so important to decide which diets should be upheld or restored, but that place-based research can highlight the dynamics of social, political, economic and environmental change and their bearing on diet. In this case, traditional diets, always a mixture of regionally imported and endogenous goods, have been eroded not due to shifts in individual choices, but for the myriad inter-locking reasons detailed by the narratives discussed above. Alternative pathways might be better carved from an understanding of the cultural appropriateness of these choices based not only on tradition, but on narratives pertaining to the aspirations of islanders - as social actors - such as their desire to access to affordable fresh produce. We suggest there is a concomitant will among islanders to meet these goals through diversified trade relationships, supporting local agricultural development, and to put in place mechanisms that ensure greater access to fish caught in local waters. Much as Schiavoni (2016) suggests, we argue that efforts to realise food sovereignty will do well to engage with such a broad array of social actors, paying attention also to their interconnections with the food system over time. That is, analysis of the historical roots to opportunities and constraints within this system is not simply 'background' information, but offers germs of understandings that open pathways to a new politics of the possible for the future.

The case presented here shows that such engagement can reveal an appetite for change, which have long been dismissed under the assumption islanders are content to let the tides of change that have eroded preferred diets to continue to wash over them. This dominant discourse points to both the drudgery of farming and to the toil and oppression of their dark history of plantation slavery as a reason to sit on future agricultural development. Indeed, as Agarwal (2014) and Li (2014) remind us, many small farmers would leave this profession, given the choice, and some do just that without a backward glance. However, the question of agency and aspiration of the 'peasant' farmer remains one that can only be understood through analysis of the inter-relationship of political, social, ecological and institutionally 'nested systems' (Van der Ploeg 2014), grounded in one place (Marsden 2012), and over time (Schiavoni 2016). This brings us to suggest an expanded framework for food sovereignty as a a process that takes seriously the need for trade (Burnett and Murphy

2014), but also its history in reciprocal exchanges that built the foundations of so-called traditional diets and the role of trade in securing access to valued foods into the future.

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